



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Military Aircraft Accident Summary

Aircraft:	Harrier GR3 XV809
Date of accident:	20 May 1988
Parent Airfield:	RAF Gutersloh, Germany
Place of accident:	RAF Gutersloh
Crew:	One
Casualties:	One Fatal

Circumstances

1. On 20 May 1988 the pilot of Harrier XV809 was scheduled to fly a low level training sortie from RAF Gutersloh. After briefing and preparing for his sortie, the pilot accepted his aircraft, started up and called for taxi clearance requesting a low level departure. The airfield weather was 3 to 4/8 cloud cover at 800 ft with a main base at 1200 to 1500 ft. Visibility was good to 10 kms.

2. The pilot started his take off run from the threshold of runway 27. The ground run was normal but, after the aircraft maintained a level flight path at approximately 50 ft until 5500 ft down the runway where it pitched up smoothly into a 30 degree climb. Passing about 500 ft the aircraft rolled 120 degrees to the right, and at an estimated height of 800 ft with a reducing angle of climb, entered cloud. Some 3-5 seconds later the aircraft reappeared rolling to wings level in a steep nose down attitude on a heading of about 340 degrees. The aircraft pitched towards the horizontal but continued to descend and struck the ground in a slightly nose down attitude with about 10 degrees of bank to the right. The aircraft broke up and caught fire on impact. The pilot made no attempt to eject and was killed.

Cause

3. There was no evidence of any unservicability with the aircraft and, it was noted that the pilot had flown similar take-offs but in clear weather on the 3 previous sorties. There was no evidence of pilot incapacitation nor of a flying control restriction or failure. The Inertial Navigation platform was correctly aligned and the head down Attitude Indicator had been working: instrument failure was therefore discounted as a probable cause of the accident.

4. It was therefore concluded that the main cause of the accident was incorrect instrument recovery action by the pilot after entering cloud at low level. The major contributory cause was the decision to fly a steep climb out during a low level departure with a cloud base of 800 ft.

Subsequent Actions

5. Local airfield flying orders have been expanded to include a requirement for duty aircrew to report any non-standard manoeuvring to the supervisory staff of the flying unit concerned.